

Healing

Reflect on any areas you wish to invite God's healing presence into:

- Hurts and wounds from your past
- Lies you believe about yourself
- Fears

With the Lord, reflect on any of the following. (Don't feel the need to do all three at once. It's better to take your time with each of these.)

1. Are there painful experiences from my past that continue to impact my life and that I would like God to heal?
2. Have I embraced lies about myself that I need to release? (i.e. I'm not enough, I'm not valuable, I am unworthy of love, I am unseen, I am a failure)
3. Are there hurts or fears that I need to release to Him?

Are you willing to invite Jesus to bring his healing and truth to these areas? Try the following exercise, taking your time with each step. (If experiencing God in your imagination is new to you, you may want to read the "Holy Imagination" handout first.)

- Close your eyes. Imagine Jesus standing in front of you. His hands are open as he asks you to hand that hurtful memory/event, lie or fear to him.
- When you feel ready, hand that to him. Linger with him in that place. Notice, what does he do with it?
- Ask him what he would like to give you in return. Using your imagination, hold out your hands and allow him to give you something in exchange.

When you are finished, spend some time journaling about this experience.

Encouragement

Without looking them up first, choose one of the following Scripture references (Or, ask God to highlight one for you). Once you've chosen one, look it up in your Bible.

<i>Isaiah 43:4-5</i>	<i>1 Peter 2:9</i>	<i>Joshua 1:9</i>	<i>Isaiah 49:15-16</i>	<i>Psalms 103:11-14</i>
<i>Deut 7:6</i>	<i>Ephesians 1:3-4</i>	<i>Psalms 37:23-24</i>	<i>John 15:15-16,</i>	<i>Isaiah 43:18-19</i>
<i>Isaiah 58:11</i>	<i>2 Cor. 4:16-18</i>	<i>Romans 8:37-38</i>	<i>Deut. 33:26-27</i>	<i>Isaiah 61:10</i>

1. Read your passage slowly.
2. Read it again, paying attention to any word or phrase that may jump out at you. Sit with that word for a few moments.
3. Notice — What does this passage tell you about what God is like or who he is? Journal your reflections.

The Bible is a book of PROMISES. God has supernatural hope for EVERY situation. Think of an area of your life where you are discouraged, need hope, or need to be reminded that his love is surrounding you in that situation. – Let your unfailing love surround us, LORD, for our hope is in you alone. Psalm 33:2

4. Ask God — “God what is your hope for this situation.” What is my promise through this Bible passage that I can apply to that situation?

If you have time, do step 5 now. Otherwise take this home and do it this coming week during your time with God.

5. Rewrite — Take your thoughts from your journaling and rewrite your passage in your own words, expounding on its meaning for you. Make this a prayerful declaration over your life in the coming weeks.

Affirmation

God thinks about you!

How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand!

Psalm 139:17-18 NLT

Every single moment you are thinking of me! How precious and wonderful to consider that you cherish me constantly in your every thought! O God, your desires toward me are more than the grains of sand on every shore!

Psalm 139:17-18 TPT

A group of researchers from Hawaii estimate the number of grains of sand on all of the beaches on the earth to be more than seven quintillion grains. **(7,000,000,000,000,000,000)**

That's an overwhelming number of grains. That's an overwhelming number of thoughts!

Is it hard for you to imagine that God is always thinking about you? Ephesians 1:4 says that even before he made the world, God loved you and chose you to be holy and without fault in his eyes. Before God made the world, and possibly long before that, God loved you and chose you. He was thinking about you back then and hasn't stopped thinking about you. You've been on his heart for thousands of years (or more). In fact, you were on his heart before time was even created.

Have you ever stopped to ask God just exactly WHAT he thinks about you? **This time of reflection has been created for you to do just that.**

1. Choose one or two of the following questions to ask God. Use your journal to write down what you hear.

What do you think of me?

How do you see me?

How do you feel about me?

Why did you create me?

Revelation of Love

Sometimes things get in the way of our ability to fully receive and experience his love and we need healing. Painful experiences can cause us to put up our guard because our trust has been broken and it's hard to make ourselves vulnerable, even with God.

God wants to heal those places so that we can fully open our hearts to his love. This exercise will give you an opportunity to explore any barriers you may have and invite God's love into places that need his healing touch.

1. With the Lord, reflect on any of the following
 - **Is there a way you experienced your earthly parents** that has negatively influenced how you see God and his love?
 - **Are there painful life experiences** that have negatively impacted the way you see God and his love?
2. *Are you willing to invite Jesus in to bring his healing to these areas?* Release these things to him and invite him to invade those areas of your heart that need his touch.
3. Ask him to speak truth and love to your heart.
4. Journal what you sense he is saying to you.
5. Allow yourself a few minutes just to sit in his presence and receive his love and affection for you.

*If there are people who have hurt you that you have not yet forgiven, this is a necessary step to full healing. If you are not ready to do this today, please seek out a mentor or counselor who can help you process your loss more deeply and release and forgive those who have hurt you.

Holy Imagination

By Holli Aparicio

"In the last days," God says, "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams."

Acts 2:17

The ability God has given us to see, perceive, and creatively use our imagination sets us apart from every other living thing on the planet. It is truly a gift.

Often when we take time to listen to God, we expect to hear him only in words. I want to make an important point: *God's first language is not English*. The language of heaven is not limited to words.

In the Bible, you see God speaking through symbols, dreams, visions, and the like.¹ He does use words because he understands they are the primary method of communication for us, but he is not limited to them.

One of the reasons God created our imaginations is so that we can connect with him and hear from him. The western world has trained us to trust primarily in logic and the concrete, and this has greatly influenced how the modern-day church interacts with the Holy Spirit. But Christianity is meant to be experienced with our whole being. Yes, our mind, but also our heart, spirit, imagination, and soul.²

We use our imagination all the time for all sorts of things. We use it to rehearse an argument with someone we disagree with. We use it to rehearse our worries or ruminate on all the wrongs done to us. How much better to use it for God's glory? That is why he gave it to us!

When we are in Christ and we have brought our minds, imaginations, and will under his reign, we can safely explore what it means to listen to him and hear him. He wants to meet each one of us in a deeply personal way.³

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

God loves to speak in symbols. Much of the time when Jesus was teaching, he used parables and metaphors.⁴ One of the reasons for this is that words speak to our minds,

¹ Ezekiel 37:1-2, Matthew 2:13, Acts 16:9-10

² Mark 12:30

³ 1 Corinthians 2:16b, Colossians 3:2

⁴ Matthew 13:34

while images and symbols connect to our hearts.

Open your Bible and read Acts 10:9-16 before moving on.

If you are familiar with this story from Acts, you know that Peter eventually realized God was trying to tell him that the gospel was for the Gentiles too.

I don't know about you, but I've often thought it would have been so much easier if God had been a bit more direct. It seems like a lot of work—putting Peter in a trance, using sheets, animals, and the idea of killing and eating unclean animals—to make the point that the gospel was *also* for the Gentiles. Nevertheless, when God speaks, sometimes he is mysterious. When God speaks, sometimes he uses pictures, visions, and yes, even something like a trance to communicate with us.

If you've never heard from God through pictures, I want to take you through a simple exercise to illustrate it.

*Imagine a lemon. See it in your mind's eye.
Notice the shape, color, attributes.
Close your eyes for a moment and explore your lemon.*

This is often what it looks like when God speaks to us through pictures. If you were able to see imagine this lemon, you can receive pictures from God! Now let's try this again:

*Imagine your lemon again.
Imagine a knife slicing the lemon open and squeezing a little of the juice in your mouth. (I bet you just produced an increased amount of saliva!)*

If you were able to experience this, then you can receive visions from God in your mind.* It's that simple!

If you are someone who does hear God already in this way, take time to reflect on the ways God has spoken to you through pictures or visions. What impact have those encounters had on your life?

If this concept is new to you, take some time to journal your reactions to this idea. Have you had reservations in the past about allowing God to speak to you through your imagination? Take time to process this with God and ask him to expand your capacity to hear from him in this way.

*There are different types of visions. The one illustrated above is like a moving picture in your imagination. A less common type of vision is an "open" vision. This is when you actually see the vision in the natural (most likely this was Peter's experience).

GROWING IN PRAYER

Learning to Listen Well



Hearing from God is a training school led by the Holy Spirit. We learn to know the heart and language of the Lord, and to understand that He doesn't speak to everyone in the exact same way. He is building a deeper relationship with us individually through different phases of this training. One phase is listening for and discerning the voice of our Lord.

We may be learning or growing in the ability to:

- 1) hear in the context of our own lives, needs and relationships.
- 2) hear for someone we may not even know. We would understand that God has prompted us and will show us what to pray as we wait on Him.
- 3) hear on behalf of one another in a group. We listen together, and we listen specifically as we pray for each one. We learn to wait a moment before we launch in, honoring the Lord by making room for Him to tell us what is on His heart for our sister or brother.

Taught by the Spirit of Truth

John 14:24-26

Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

John 16:13

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

What we learn through the Holy Spirit comes through what He himself hears from the Father. We can, in turn, ask Him what we need to learn.

—ASK

- 1) that the Holy Spirit would teach you to pray.
- 2) that He would give you understanding of scriptures about the Spirit and prayer that perplex you.
- 3) that He would help you trust His leading in areas of prayer where you need to grow and deepen.

—IN RELATIONSHIP

- 1) God with us: When we bring a new baby home from the hospital, we may initially rely on the good advice of others in caring for it. We quickly realize this little one is unique. In a way, its personality will shape how we parent, combining good practices with flexibility based on how they're wired and what they seem to need from us. This also applies to God's training of us.
- 2) We with God: David is a good model of one who knew God. He knew God's heart. He was a man after God's heart and would do all God's will (Acts 13:22). He knew that God knew him through and through (Ps. 139:1-18). We get to know the heart and purposes of another by listening carefully to what they entrust to us because we really care. Because we really care to know God's ways we will ask for and listen intently for His leading and purposes.

Unique Journey ≠ Wisdom in the Process

Isaiah 55:2-3b ≠ Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live....

Jeremiah 2:13 ≠ ... for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

NORTH  HEIGHTS

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Why would we prefer things that don't satisfy? What is there about listening to God that satisfies the yearnings of the soul?

There is a spectrum of attitudes about hearing His voice. There are those who feel it is presumptuous, perhaps even dangerous, to think God would speak to us. There are many for whom the norm is to hear from Him daily in great and small things. They would say, "Why wouldn't you expect God to talk to you?" Many of us are satisfied as we are. We may need to ask God to awaken us to this good gift He has for us.

Why not ask?

Need: The health of our soul can depend greatly on how we approach our heavenly Father. Who else can truly affirm our worth? Who knows and cares about us more than the Lord? No matter how well we are handling things we may not be in touch with our core needs and desires. We may have thirsts related to our deficits in love and nurture. Or, we may simply be missing the richness of relationship with God and not realize it. We can simply ask that He would draw us back to Himself and give us a thirst for His love – His fountain of living water.

Barriers to Trusting His Voice: The need for caution in assuming we have heard from the Lord is real. That is why we are led on a personal path. "Is it my own voice?" we wonder. God's training includes distinguishing between what we want to hear and the ability to clearly identify His voice and message. He will help and train us to identify our thoughts and desires. We can rely on His help!

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb. 4:12).

We can test what we are hearing against the truths of Scripture by asking Him:



- 1) Please confirm that this is from You.
- 2) Is this meant for me to know and pray about, or am I also to share this with someone?
- 3) Is this for now, or sometime in the future?

His word to us can also be a prompt that He wants to speak to us about something weightier. "Take time to sit with it and with Me. I will show you what you need to understand."

Asking – Seeking – Knocking

Jesus' teaching from Luke 11: 9-10 is key in listening prayer. Our asking opens the way for the Lord to respond. Below are examples of basic questions.

FOUNDATIONAL QUESTIONS

These are extremely basic and can be part of our prayer time, or any time. The point is that when we have asked, we stop and wait for a response. We can easily go on to form our own questions.

- 1) Lord, what is on your heart about this person, situation, task, problem, or me? We go beyond what we see and understand to the purposes of Jesus that spring from His deep, caring heart. Knowing God's heart purposes shows us how to act or speak effectively, our efforts focused in the right direction.
- 2) Lord, what do you have for me in this situation, this day, this assignment, etc? This opens the door for God to deepen our understanding, knowing we are willing to alter our assumptions and honor His Lordship! It clears the clutter of options and puts us on the same path He is on, serving His purposes, which may prove different than ours.
- 3) Lord, what is the path of love in this particular moment or relationship? We're inviting Him to pave a way for a healing conversation or act that restores what is broken. His way and timing can guard us from human efforts that make things worse or, from failing to address the situation at all.
- 4) Creative questions; nothing is too basic!! Questions show that our heart is fully engaged—wanting to join Him in what He is doing, and to "know the Father's business" (John 15:15-16). Our prayer becomes a conversation rather than a

monologue. We can build off such simple questions as: What are Your purposes in this moment? What am I supposed to be seeking or asking? Do I have a role here?

5) The vast realm of dialogue with God! We invite the Counselor into our world by leaving room for Him to speak. He may have answers to questions that haven't yet occurred to us. In quiet waiting there is the "still small voice," speaking to the quieted heart with its capacity to hear and understand.

6) Images and Symbols We can ask God to give us a picture of what He wants us to understand. For example, He may want to show us our role, or how a situation is impacting us. We would know how to pray according to His purposes. The image may be a literal representation of what we need to see. Or, it may be akin to Jesus' parables, offering symbols that convey the meaning behind what we are experiencing, or, clarifying what we're meant to learn. The image may stay with us, unfolding God's message like a puzzle, coming together piece by piece, over time.

To listen to God is to look up to Him with the heart. Through the eyes and ears of the heart we see and hear God – we apprehend the transcendent. The Scriptures graciously invite us to look up and see the invisible. (See Ezek. 44:4; Ezra 8:22; Acts 7:55-56; Luke 1:38).

True listening prayer is obedient listening. To listen to God is to obey Him. Wisdom from above is received by those who are prepared to obey it. To listen in prayer for the voice of the Lord is to find the mind of Christ. • Leanne Payne¹



¹ Listening Prayer by Leanne Payne; A Hamewith Book, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI; *Summary of excerpts, Chapter 8, Listening to God, pp. 121-132*

FAMILIAR SCRIPTURES THAT CALL US TO DRAW NEAR

Psalms 27:4, 8 ▪ Isaiah 55:1-3a ▪ Song of Songs 2:14
Acts 13:22 ▪ Revelation 3:20 ▪ Psalm 139:1-18

Psalm 139: 1-6

O Lord, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.

Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?



WRITING AS WE PRAY

BENEFITS OF A PRAYER JOURNAL*
DRAWING ON THE SPRING OF LIFE



1. Taking time to write out what is going on in our lives and what we think and feel about these things is even more valuable when we do it prayerfully.
2. The writing we do can unlock our soul because we must work to express what is real to us.
 - Find the words, the language
 - Identify the dynamics, as we see them
 - Open to God the recesses of our soul in detail, including how a situation has affected us
3. Investing genuinely in our communication with our Maker and Redeemer honors Him. Rev 3:20 He knocks; we invite Him in Ps.27:8 He says, "seek my face." And like King David, we say, "Your face Lord do I seek."

4. Processing within our hearts in the light of Scripture makes room for His Presence: the Word made flesh who dwells in us. We make room for His Presence as we notice where our soul is cluttered or focused on the presence of other things that vie with His Lordship.

*We use the term journal as opposed to diary or notebook because, by definition, it is more personal: “a record of experiences, ideas, or reflections kept regularly for private use¹”. A diary or notebook often includes a record of events, transactions, observations and memoranda. (Merriam-Webster on-line dictionary)

Developing a Journaling Method

Writing in your journal can be completely freestyle and spontaneous. But if you feel the need to establish a pattern, and order the path, here is a simple Bible study method gleaned from Intervarsity Christian Fellowship, based on Lectio Divina*.

1. Exactly what does the text say?
2. What is the interpretation of the text?
3. How does the text apply to my life?
4. What, beyond these considerations, is the Lord saying to me through this text?

Brief explanation of what each step might cover

1. What does the text say:
 - Facts involving people, place, setting or action, any historical facts which impact your understanding of the passage.
 - Statements about God’s character or nature.
 - Promises or claims, either conditional or unconditional, to be appropriated.
 - Anything else which strikes you about the facts involved.
2. What is the interpretation of the text?
 - What is the message of the speaker(s)? For example, if Jesus is speaking, what lesson or information is He conveying?

- What meaning is there in this passage for the people involved in the scene? For example, in reading about Noah you might interpret his actions in light of God’s message to his generation.
- Go beyond the facts to the underlying meaning in the context of the passage and its general application.

3. How does the text apply to your life?

- Apply the text and truth to your own life. Does it call for a response? Does it call for self-examination? Is there something to lay hold of for your life? (For example, reading the Sermon on the Mount moves us to examine our lives according to Jesus’ most central teachings.)
- Internalize and personalize the truths in any way that seems appropriate, asking God for insight.
- If God speaks to you about something you should do in response, use this time to pray, to yield, etc.

4. What else might the Lord be saying to you through this?

- During this time, allow the Lord to speak further to you about yourself and about Himself.
- Wait in silence for several moments, worshipping, listening, allowing time and quiet for the Lord to speak into your heart—to dialogue with you.
- Write down anything else He brings to mind.
- We don’t always hear something specific from the Lord, and we don’t always have words for what we feel.

5. It is good to have the freedom to just BE in God’s presence, whether or not we come away with a fresh impression or message. We may simply want to minister to the Lord in worship, just telling Him that we love Him. We may need to wait in His Presence, letting the Holy Spirit wash or fill or renew us in some way.

*"Lectio Divina", a Latin term, means "divine reading" and describes a way of reading the Scriptures whereby we gradually let go of our own agenda and open ourselves to what God wants to say to us. In the 12th century, a Carthusian monk called Guigo, described the stages which he saw as essential to the practice of Lectio Divina. There are various ways of practicing Lectio Divina either individually or in groups but Guigo's description remains fundamental. The Order of Carmelites / www.ocarm.org

SING A NEW SONG



*Oh sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth!
Psalm 96:1*

Our dialogue with the Lord, spoken, prayed, sung, or written, is an opportunity for the release of the song of our heart. That deepest heart song gives Him access to us beyond the filters of our thought life. A song rises from the emotional self, a spontaneous expression of how we feel, whether we're joyful, sorrowful, grateful or needing a way to express our deep love for Him.

What characterizes that dialogue?

How often we respond by applying His truths, as we must, but miss or avoid real transparency with Him? Do we know the full value of His Presence in our inner lives? Are we familiar with the tender, personal counsel of the Lord that comes with a different meaning: His affection for us.

To sing a new song is to release the wellspring of our heart in response to His love.

HOW DO WE GIVE GOD GREATER ACCESS TO OUR HEART ?

1. RESPONDING TO A FELT NEED | IN TOUCH WITH OUR THIRST

- Ask the Lord to show you what He desires of your love that He does not have?

- Ask yourself what is lacking? What am I not seeing? What exactly does God have for me that I am not thirsty for?
- Do you recognize His invitations to engage more personally with you?
- Ask God to help you experience His love more deeply—to be more receptive to Him.

2. PREPARED GROUND: QUIETED AND RECEPTIVE

Find time with the Lord when you can give Him your full attention—a quieted mind and an open spirit. Pray for receptivity to His voice. Consider scriptures that point to this intimacy with God and pray them as your own. (Ps. 27:8; Song of Songs 2:14)

3. MINISTERING FROM A HEART I KNOW!

The quality of our security in God's love affects how others receive our ministry. God affirmed David as a man "after His own heart" who would do all His will. What value do we put on the fruits of knowing God's heart as it affects our serving? One precious gift of a deepening relationship with the Lord is that we know Him, and are known by Him, more experientially. His Presence in us is apparent to those we serve, and we become more sensitive to what moves God's heart.

Surprised by Love?

Have you ever received a love letter or card expressing affection or affirmation for you? Our God is an emotional, feeling Person. As we form a habit, and build a highway of real dialog in our souls, He will use that way to speak of how He feels toward us. As a parent looks for ways to affirm and bless a child, so our Father longs to "speak tenderly"¹ to us. In some cases, He has waited a long time to convict our hearts—to prepare us to really hear and internalize His "I love you."

To quote a listener, Frances J. Roberts, who has recorded much of God's counsel in her book Come Away My Beloved,² this assurance of God's love is essential to all else. Below is a portion of one message, The Love Covenant:

Service is the salvage of love. It is like the twelve baskets of bread that were left over. The bread that was eaten was like fellowship mutually given; and the excess and overflow was a symbol of service. I do not expect you to give to others until you have first eaten. I will provide you with plentiful supply to give if you first come to receive for your own needs.

This is not selfishness. It is the Law of Life. Can the stalk of corn produce the ear unless first it receives its own life from the parent seed? No more can you produce fruit in your ministry unless you are impregnated with divine life from its source in God Himself. It was from the hands of the Christ that the multitudes received bread. From His hands you also must receive your nurture, the Bread of Life to sustain your health and your life.

This is His love-covenant with you. It is the message of John 15:4: "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me." This abiding is a love relationship, and this is why I said, "Service is the salvage of love."

Service will be futile and burdensome unless it springs from an overflowing heart. Overflowing not with good intentions and condescending self-righteousness but overflowing with the love of God. This you do not have of yourself, nor can you give, however much you might desire to do so. You shall possess this love only as you wait upon Me, and take time to absorb it from Me, like a quiet flower takes life from the warm rays of the sun.

¹ Hosea 2:14

² Barbour Publishing, Inc., Uhrichsville, PA, 2002; pp. 204-205 Used by Permission